

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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AMEMBASSY PARIS
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UNCLAS CANBERRA 4680

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, AS
SUBJ: MAY UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS - SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT CONTINUES

REF: CANBERRA 3811, 2758, 2682, 2549, 1051 AND 2186.

1. SUMMARY: UNEMPLOYMENT CONTINUED TO DROP DURING MAY. THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE LOOKING FOR FULL OR PART-TIME WORK FELL FROM 401,700 TO 392,800, OR FROM 6.3 TO 6.1 PERCENT OF THE TOAL LABOR FORCE ACCORDING TO PRELIMINARY FIGURES PUBLISHED BY THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (ABS) ON JUNE 9. THE SEASONAL IMPROVEMENT EXPECTED AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, HOWEVER, WAS WEAKER THAN USUAL. UNEMPLOYMENT ALTHOUGH DOWN FROM THE FEBRUARY PEAK OF 7.4 PERCENT WAS STILL 22 PERCENT HIGHER THAN MAY 1977.

2. A CONTINUED DOWNWARD TREND IN UNEMPLOYMENT WAS OFFSET BY A DECREASE IN THE NUMBER OF JOBS AVAILABLE DURING MAY. STATISTICS ISSUED ON JUNE 9 BY THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (ABS) AND UNCLASSIFIED

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THE COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE (CES) SHOW THAT ALTHOUGH THE RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT FELL FROM APRIL'S 6.3 OR 6.2 PERCENT TO 6.1 PERCENT IN MAY, THE RATIO OF PEOPLE OUT OF WORK, HOWEVER, INCREASED FROM 21.7 IN APRIL TO 21.9 IN MAY.

3. THE ABS FIGURES WHICH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PREFERS SHOW A DECREASE IN UNEMPLOYMENT OF 8,300 TO 392,800. THE CES DATA SHOWS

392,163 PEOPLE REGISTERED AS UNEMPLOYED DOWN 10,371 FROM APRIL.

4. A KEY SECTION OF THE ABS FIGURES - THAT FOR UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE LOOKING FOR FULL TIME WORK - SHOWED A DROP OF 3,900 TO 329,600 IN MAY OVER APRIL.

5. ABS, HOWEVER, POINTED OUT THAT THERE WAS A STANDARD ERROR OF 4,300 IN THE APRIL TO MAY MOVEMENT. ABS ALSO SAID THAT THE SLIGHT OVERALL IMPROVEMENT IS DUE MAINLY TO A CONTINUED DROP OF SCHOOL LEAVERS. THIS IS DUE MAINLY TO GOVERNMENT YOUTH SUPPORT PROGRAMS.

6. THE FEDERAL MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY REPORTED ON JUNE 9 THAT AT THE START OF JUNE, 272,384 PEOPLE WERE RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, A DROP OF 10,924 DURING MAY.

COMMENT: THE ACTING MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS - MR. FIFE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS FAR FROM SATISFIED WITH THE MAY RESULTS AND HAD EXPECTED A LARGER DECLINE. HE DENIED THE REAL SITUATION WAS WORSENING, BUT SAID MAY'S FIGURES SHOWED ONLY A VERY MARGINAL IMPROVEMENT.

THE ALP OPPOSITION SHADOW TREASURER AND SPOKESMAN ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MR. WILLIS SEVERLY CRITICIZED THE MAY FIGURES.

HE POINTED OUT THAT BOTH CES AND ABS FIGURES SHOWED A RISE OF 22 AND 20 PERCENT IN UNEMPLOYMENT FOR THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS. HE
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SAID THE TIGHTENING OF THE JOB MARKET WAS REFLECTED IN THE FIGURES FOR JOB VACANCIES WHICH SHOWED THE RATION OF JOB SEEKERS HAD MOVED FROM 16 TO 1 IN MAY 1977 TO 21.9 TO 1 THIS YEAR.

MR. WILLIS ALSO SAID THE GOVERNMENT STILL REFUSES TO PUBLISH SEASONAL ADJUSTMENTS, BUT USING THOSE OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (ANU), "WE SEE A RISE OF 6,000 OR 1.5 PERCENT ON THE PAST MONTH."

HE ADDED, "THE LATEST EMPLOYMENT FIGURES ARE A DIRECT CONTRADICTION OF REPEATED GOVERNMENT CLAIMS THAT UNEMPLOYMENT HAS BEEN FALLING."
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